Bible Chronology Timeline - Page 4b

V. Relationships of Reigns in Divided Kingdom

The Bible Data for the Reigns.—From the death of Solomon, when the kingdoms of Judah and Israel were separated, the books of Kings introduce each king of Israel or Judah with a fixed formula in which the year of his accession to the throne is synchronized with the corresponding year of the contemporary ruler of the other Hebrew kingdom, followed by the length of his reign and—usually, in the case of Judah—the age of the king at the time of his accession. For example, “In the twenty and seventh year of Jeroboam [II] king of Israel began Azariah son of Amaziah king of Judah to reign. Sixteen years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned two and fifty years in Jerusalem” (2 Kings 15:1, 2).

The following tabulation of the kings arranged in the order in which they are introduced in the books of Kings gives the accession data and lengths of reigns.

Bible Data for the Reigns of Judah and Israel

Ruler	Kingdom	Accession Synchronism	Years of Reign		
			I Kings		**I Kings**
Rehoboam	Judah		12:1	17	14:21
Jeroboam I	Israel		12:20	22	14:20
Abijam	Judah	18th of Jeroboam	15:1	3	15:2
Asa	Judah	20th of Jeroboam	15:9	41	15:10
Nadab	Israel	2nd of Asa	15:25	2	15:25
Baasha	Israel	3rd of Asa	15:28	24	15:33
Elah	Israel	26th of Asa	16:8	2	16:8
Zimri	Israel	27th of Asa	16:10	(7 days)	16:15
Tibni	Israel		16:21		
Omri	Israel	31st of Asa	16:23	12	16:23
Ahab	Israel	38th of Asa	16:29	22	16:29
Jehoshaphat	Judah	4th of Ahab	22:41	25	22:42
Ahaziah	Israel	17th of Jehoshaphat	22:51	2	22:51
			II Kings		**II Kings**
JoramJoram	Israel	2nd of Jehoram	1:17		
Joram	Israel	18th of Jehoshapat	3:1	12	3:1
Jehoram	Judah	5th of Joram	8:16	8	8:17

Ahaziah	Judah	12th (11th) of Joram	8:25 (9:29)	1	8:26
Jehu	Israel		9:12, 13	28	10:36
Athaliah	Judah		11:1, 3	7	11:3, 4
Joash	Judah	7th of Jehu	12:1	40	12:1
Jehoahaz	Israel	23rd of Joash	13:1	17	13:1
Jehoash	Israel	37th of Joash	13:10	16	13:10
Amaziah	Judah	2nd of Jehoash	14:1	29	14:2
Jeroboam (II)	Israel	15th of Amaziah	14:23	41	14:2
Azariah (Uzziah)	Judah	27th of Jeroboam	15:1	52	15:2
Zachariah	Israel	38th of Azariah	15:8	(6 months)	15:8
Shallum	Israel	39th of Azariah	15:13	(1 month)	15:13
Menahem	Israel	39th of Azariah	15:17	10	15:17
Pekahiah	Israel	50th of Azariah	15:23	2	15:23
Pekah	Israel	52nd of Azariah	15:27	20	15:27
Hoshea	Israel	20th of Jotham	15:30		
Hoshea	Israel	12th of Ahaz	17:1	9	17:1
Jotham	Judah	2nd of Pekah	15:32	16 (20)	15:33 (30)
Ahaz	Judah	17th of Pekah	16:1	16	16:2
Hezekiah	Judah	3rd of Hoshea	18:1	29	18:2
Manasseh	Judah		21:1	55	21:1
Amon	Judah		21:19	2	21:19
Josiah	Judah		22:1	31	22:1
Jehoahaz	Judah		23:31	(3 months)	23:31
Jehoiakim	Judah		23:36	11	23:36
Jehoiachin	Judah		24:8	(3 months)	24:8
Zedekiah	Judah		24:17	11	24:18

Difficulties in Harmonizing the Reigns.—With all this information, the construction of an exact chronology of the period of the kings would seem to be an easy task. But often the accession of one king, as dated in a specific year of another, seems to be out of harmony with the data for the length of the reigns. The various attempts to harmonize the reigns and to solve the difficulties have given rise to so many revisions of the data to suit individual theories, ignoring the details of the Biblical record, that the result is, in most cases, a series of conjectures rather than a systematic chronology based on the source material.

But recent study of the chronological methods of the various ancient nations, derived from a wealth of archeological documents dated according to ancient calendars, has shown that the data in the books of the Kings can be worked into a reasonable chronology without the drastic revisions referred to. When the basic

principles of these synchronisms are arrived at inductively from the Biblical data, and applied to the problem, many of the supposed difficulties vanish. After a survey of general principles and methods of regnal reckoning and their specific applications to the Hebrew kings, the next step will be to explain thereby some of the main points in the outline of the period under consideration. Of course, no detailed, step-by-step analysis of all the reigns will be attempted in this summary.

The four general hypotheses already enumerated are explained and applied in the following paragraphs.

Judah's Year Begins in Fall, Israel's in Spring.—There is evidence in the Bible that the kings of Judah reckoned their regnal years from the fall—presumably Tishri 1—not only in the time of Solomon, but also in the reign of Josiah. During repairs on the Temple, in the 18th year of Josiah's reign, the workmen found a copy of the book of the Law. Upon reading the scroll the king instituted a mighty reform and held a great Passover, the like of which had not been seen in the history of the divided kingdom. Now the Passover comes on the 14th of Nisan, the first month of the religious year, beginning in the spring; but in this case both the beginning of the Temple repair and the great Passover took place in the 18th year (2 Kings 22:3, 5; 2 Kings 23:23). Since it is evident that all the events described in these two chapters could not have taken place in the first two weeks of the year, obviously the 18th year did not begin with Nisan. Judah must have employed the civil calendar year beginning with Tishri. The fall reckoning would allow six months for the events described above.

These observations have long been recognized by many scholars as evidence for the fall-to-fall regnal year in Judah. Since there is evidence of such a reckoning in the time of Solomon, and again in the time of Josiah, there is no reason to doubt that the year was so reckoned throughout the history of Judah. It is interesting to note that the synchronisms between the reigns of the northern and the southern kingdoms can be harmonized on the basis of such a reckoning for Judah, whereas certain difficulties arise if we try to use a spring-to-spring year for Judah.

On the other hand, although there is no evidence in the text of the Bible, the synchronisms between the reigns of the two kingdoms seem to indicate that Israel used a year beginning in the spring. Many scholars who have reckoned these reigns by various methods have assumed that numerous apparent discrepancies in the synchronisms are due to errors in the Biblical text, and hence do not believe a reconciliation possible, or do not attempt to achieve one. Since the use of a spring-beginning year in Israel alongside a fall-to-fall year for Judah eliminates many of

the supposed discrepancies, this sort of regnal reckoning is the more probable. Until someone produces a better scheme based on a different principle, it is assumed that this method, since it works best, is to be preferred.

A possible reason offered for the spring year in Israel is that Jeroboam, the founder of the northern kingdom, who had been a political refugee in Egypt, may have been influenced by the Egyptian New Year which, in its rotation through the seasons began in the spring in Jeroboam's day. Or he may have chosen the spring New Year's Day instead of Tishri 1, in the autumn, merely in order to be different from Judah, just as he set up a new priesthood and inaugurated a feast in the eighth month in place of the old feast of the seventh month (1 Kings 12:30-33).

Accession-Year and Non-Accession-Year Systems.—Evidence is found in the synchronisms that in the early years of the divided kingdoms Judah was using the accession-year system of reckoning and Israel the non-accession-year system.

Rehoboam and Jeroboam began to reign approximately together after the death of Solomon, and Ahaziah of Judah and Joram of Israel died at the same time, when Jehu seized the northern kingdom. Therefore the reigns during this period should total the same for both kingdoms; but the sum of the years in these reigns recorded for Israel is higher than that for Judah. If the totals are checked reign by reign from the beginning, it will be seen that this difference increases by one year for each king. This would be accounted for if in Israel the death year of each king bore two numbers, the last of one reign and the first of the next, while in Judah the first year of each reign was that following the death year of the preceding king; that is, if Israel used the non-accession-year and Judah the accession-year reckoning.

That this is true can be demonstrated by individual cases. While Jeroboam of Israel was reigning 22 years, there were three kings on the throne of Judah: Rehoboam, 17 years; Abijam, 3 years; and Asa, to his 2nd year. The exact relationship between these reigns is more complex, but from these figures it can be seen that there was no overlap of one year for each reign; the 17 years of Rehoboam, the 3 of Abijam, and the 2 of Asa in Judah total the 22 years of Jeroboam in Israel. It has been shown that it is the accession-year system that gives a correct total for a series of reigns. If Judah had used the non-accession-year system, counting the last year of each king as the first of the next, the periods of 17, 3, and 2 years would cover only 20 years of actual elapsed time instead of 22. Actually the 2nd year of Asa was recorded as the beginning of the reign that followed Jeroboam's 22 years. Obviously Judah was using the accession-year reckoning, so that the 17th year of

Rehoboam was followed by the 1st of Abijam, the 3rd of Abijam by the 1st of Asa, etc.

It is equally obvious that Israel was using the other system. During the long reign of Asa of Judah several kings of Israel came to the throne, in the 2nd, 3rd, 26th, 27th, etc., of that reign. The gaps between these regnal years appear to indicate lengths of 1, 23, 1, etc., for these shorter Israelite reigns. However, the record reads: Nadab, 2 years; Baasha, 24 years; Elah, 2 years; etc. Here, then, is an overlap: If the remainder of the year of accession is called year 1, each reign gets an extra year. Nadab's 2 years are necessarily synchronized with Asa's 2nd and 3rd years, Baasha's 24 years with Asa's 3rd to 26th *inclusive.* Later we find the same thing: Omri's 12 years between the 27th and 38th of Asa, and Ahaziah's 2 years in the 17th and 18th of Jehoshaphat.

On this arrangement, with Judah counting by one system and Israel the other, both lines harmonize.

Later Changes in Accession Reckoning.—This system, deduced from the simple fact that it works, seems to be consistently used in the earlier parts of the books of Kings. Then there comes a time when the synchronisms disagree with the recorded lengths of the reigns unless it is supposed that the kings of Judah have begun reckoning their years by the Israelite non-accession-year system, while the data harmonize if a change to the Israelite method is assumed. This change could have occurred with the accession of Jehoram of Judah at the death of Jehoshaphat, or possibly at the usurpation of Athaliah; some think that she introduced the change and also reckoned the years of Jehoram by it in the official records. The old and new reckonings of that reign may furnish the explanation of the apparently conflicting records of the accession of Ahaziah of Judah in both the 11th and the 12th year of Joram of Israel (see 2 Kings 8:25; 2 Kings 9:29). The supposed contradiction disappears if it is assumed that both refer to the same year, the one numbered the 11th by the older accession-year system being the 12th year by the new non-accession-year method of counting. The reason for such a change is unknown, but it can logically be attributed to the influence of Israel. It is interesting to note that Jehoram, whose reign seems to introduce the change, was married to Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel of Israel.

Half a century later the synchronisms appear to require another change; this time they point to the adoption of the accession-year system by the northern kingdom at the accession of Jehoash in the 37th year of Joash of Judah, and then the return of Judah to the same system at Joash's death, with the accession of Amaziah. There is

nothing to indicate this except the interlocking of the reigns when diagramed according to the synchronisms, but a plausible cause might be found in the then-increasing influence of Assyria, which employed the accession-year reckoning.

Each Scribe Uses His National Regnal Reckoning.—The synchronisms seem to indicate that when the accession of a king of Judah is recorded in the book of Kings, presumably as it appeared in the official records of Judah, it is dated in terms of Judah's method of regnal-year numbering. That is, when it is dated in a year of the contemporary king of Israel, the Israelite king's regnal year is numbered by the reckoning used in Judah, even if that is different from the numbering used in Israel. Sometimes, on this basis, the number is one year lower than that reckoned in Israel; for example, the accession of Nadab of Israel, in "the second year of Asa" of Judah, occurred in what Nadab would have called Asa's second year, but what Asa called his "year 1," for the year numbered 1 in the accession-year system is numbered 2 in the non-accession-year system. This difference, of course, disappears during the time when the two kingdoms seem to be using the same system.

It is to be expected that a scribe would use his own calendar-year numbering to record the years of a foreign king; therefore this adjustment is not surprising. But he might also be expected to begin the foreign king's years by his own New Year's Day, just as in later times Nehemiah reckoned the Persian king's 20th year as beginning in the autumn, as in Judah, although the Persian year began in the spring (Nehemiah 1:1; 2:1). The synchronisms in Kings, however, seem not to be reckoned on that principle, for the discrepancies that appear if that sort of adjustment is made are avoided if it is assumed that the scribe or chronicler of each kingdom revised the year numbers of the other kingdom to his own country's method of numbering, but that he did not revise the beginning of the year. That is, the principle derives its plausibility solely from the fact that it works.

NOTE: *It has been suggested that a very slight shift of a half year in the alignment of the reigns of Israel and Judah at the beginning of the period would seen to eliminate, for the earlier portion at least, any need for this revising of Israel's non-accession-year numbering in terms of Judah's accession-year numbering, and vice versa, but would correctly synchronize the fall-to-fall regnal years as reckoned in Judah with the corresponding spring-to-spring regnal years as reckoned in Israel. This would be convincing of there were no evidence at the time when Judah changed methods, of a double reckoning (the 11th and 12th years of Joram's reign equated). Either the method of recording the regnal years varied or the hypothesis set forth in this section—that is, the consistent revision of the neighboring king's*

year number—must stand for the present, though it cannot be insisted on as a dogmatic statement of fact.

Coregencies Occur in Many Reigns.—Many of the reigns fit into the synchronisms with the other kingdom without any overlap, but in some cases there is an apparent discrepancy unless the son came to the throne some time before the father's death and ruled jointly with him, and thus the two reigns overlapped for a period of years. If, in order to make the accession synchronisms harmonize with the lengths of the reigns, such a co regency can be assumed without doing violence to any other synchronism, there is no reason why the co regency cannot be regarded as based on good evidence. Of course it cannot be taken as completely proved so long as there is the possibility of someone's explaining the data equally well by a different scheme; even the occurrence of an interregnum somewhere along the line cannot be ruled out completely. Sometimes, as in the case of Uzziah, who became incapacitated for royal duties because of leprosy, there is actual narrative evidence for a co regency (2 Kings 15:5), and there is reason to conclude that a co regency is indicated for Jehoram of Judah (2 Kings 1:17; 3:1; 8:16), but most of the cases are based solely on the necessities of the Bible data. In some of these cases the total years given in Kings seem to refer to the whole reign, including the co regency; less often to only the sole reign. Each case is determined by the synchronisms.

In the chronology employed for this commentary the following coregencies are assumed to have occurred: in the kingdom of Judah, Asa-Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat-Jehoram, Amaziah-Azariah, Azariah-Jotham, Jotham-Ahaz, Ahaz-Hezekiah, and Hezekiah-Manasseh; in that of Israel, Jehoash-Jeroboam II.

Problem Spots in This System.—Since the purpose of this article is not to set forth a chronological scheme, but to explain the basis for the dating used in this book, it is necessary to discuss only a few typical reigns. There are, however, certain problem spots that need to be mentioned.

1. The earliest is not in the series of synchronisms in the books of Kings, but is an isolated statement in Chronicles, that apparently places the building of Ramah by Baasha in the 36th year of the reign of Asa (2 Chronicles 16:1; see also 1 Kings 15:17). But Baasha died and was succeeded by his son Elah in the 26th year of Asa (1 Kings 16:6, 8). Hence he could not have built Ramah 10 years later. If, however, we understand this 36th year as referring to Asa's dynasty, not his personal reign, the problem is solved; for the 36th year from the division of the kingdom falls within the reigns of both Asa and Baasha.

2. There is an apparent discrepancy between the statements that Joram of Israel began to reign in the 2nd year of Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat of Judah and also in the 18th year of Jehoshaphat (2 Kings 1:17; 3:1); but that Jehoram of Judah began to reign in the 5th year of Joram of Israel (2 Kings 8:16). The explanation is that Jehoram of Judah was in his 2nd year of co regency, in his father's 18th year, when Joram of Israel came to the throne, but that he succeeded his father as sole ruler only in the 5th year of Joram of Israel.

3. There seems to be no room in the charting of the chronology for a 20-year reign for Pekah if it began at the time when he overthrew Pekahiah and took the throne of Israel, but if he reckoned as his the reigns of his two predecessors—that is, the house of Menahem—the 20 years would fit in. Such a procedure is not without parallel. There is a case in Egyptian history where Harmhab counted as his own all the years of four kings: Ikhnaton, Smenkhare, Tutankhamen, and Eye. Even in English history we have the case of Charles II, who came to the throne in the Restoration of 1660, but who counted his reign from the execution of Charles I in 1649, ignoring the Cromwell period.

It is possible that Pekah regarded himself as the genuine successor of the powerful dynasty of Jehu, as a patriot of the anti-Assyrian party in reaction against the "collaborationist" tendencies of Menahem, who paid tribute to Tiglath-pileser. It is even possible that, in the upheaval that put an end to Jehu's dynasty with the murder of Zachariah, Pekah had actually acquired the rule over part of Israel's territory, and so considered himself king, although he did not gain control over all of Israel until he slew Pekahiah; in that case he would not have recognized the intervening rulers as legitimate kings at all. We do not know what happened, but in the light of the historical and political background, Pekah's appropriating in his records a dozen years of reign from his predecessors cannot be considered either unprecedented or improbable.

4. Jotham is given a reign of 16 years (2 Kings 15:32, 33; 2 Chronicles 27:1, 8). Yet Hoshea came to the throne in the 20th year of Jotham (2 Kings 15:30). There is no inconsistency between two totals for a reign if a co regency took place, for one can include the entire reign and the other the sole reign. But this case seems complicated by a co regency with Ahaz at the end of Jotham's reign; the combination of the synchronisms seems to indicate that his years 16–20 cover the period after Ahaz came to the throne, when Jotham was probably no longer carrying on the affairs of state. Thus in one sense his rule could have ended in his 16th year, yet during the rest of his life his regnal years could continue to be counted.

5. Some find a problem in synchronizing the reign of Hezekiah with the reign of Hoshea. But others believe that the problem is solved by assuming a co regency, precisely as has been done elsewhere when the synchronisms seem to require it. In every case the figures must be tested by the synchronisms, and on that basis assigned to either the sole reign or the co regency or both. When this method is applied to the case of Hezekiah, it is found that the specifications are all met if it can be assumed (*a*) that Hezekiah's accession in the third year of Hoshea was the beginning of his co regency; and (*b*) that the figures for his age and the length of his reign belong to his sole reign after his father's death.

On these assumptions Hezekiah's accession formula could be understood:

"Now it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz king of Judah began to reign [as coregent with his father]. Twenty and five years old was he when he began to reign [alone at his father's death]; and he reigned twenty and nine years [in his sole reign]" (2 Kings 18:1, 2).

A similar method of interpreting the figures in the accession formula of Ahaz has been adopted by some (see 2 Kings 16:1, 2). Actually, however, if Hezekiah's age at his father's death was 25, then Ahaz' recorded age of 20 years must have referred to the beginning of Ahaz' co regency rather than to the beginning of his sole reign. Then his age at Hezekiah's birth would have been 15, which is not at all unheard of in the ancient Near East.

6. The greatest difficulty comes in the chronology of Ahaz. Hoshea came to the throne as the result of a conspiracy against Pekah. The Bible says he "made a conspiracy" in the 20th year of Jotham (2 Kings 15:30). The Assyrian annals record that the people overthrew Pekah and that Tiglath-pileser made Hoshea king. This year seems to have been the 12th of Ahaz (2 Kings 17:1). However, the rest of the chronological scheme, as it has been worked out from the other data in the Bible, does not harmonize with this last synchronism with the reign of Ahaz. This is the incomplete link in the chain. It has been remarked that the arrangement of the kings on which the dating in this commentary is based comes *nearest* to a complete harmony of all the Biblical and non-Biblical data now known. It must not be claimed as complete as long as this synchronism cannot be accounted for and the other reigns related properly to it. Therefore rather than resort to revision or conjecture, it is better to state frankly that this problem has not been solved.

There is the possibility, of course, that the apparent discrepancy is due to a

copyist’s error. However, other chronological problems formerly thought to be due to such errors can now be solved because of a better understanding of ancient methods of reckoning. Hence it is not unreasonable to hope that this particular problem will, in time, be similarly solved. Perhaps some further information may be unearthed that will help; perhaps someone can build on what has already been done and arrive at a slightly different alignment of the reigns of this period that will preserve the harmony of the synchronism and also find a place for this last piece of evidence.

Some may ask: What is the value of any pattern of chronology if it is incomplete and confessedly subject to possible revision? The answer is, Our understanding of the Bible is incomplete, and our interpretation of certain texts is, at times, in need of revision. But that fact hardly warrants the conclusion some draw, that the study long given to Scripture provides no constructive approach to its understanding. On the contrary, we believe that the longer we study the Bible, the better we see its harmony, and the more fully we are persuaded that the writers of the Scripture presented a coherent, unified line of thought.

The same is true of that part of the Bible devoted to chronology. The longer it is studied, the more it takes shape and orderly form, and the more meaningful become the historical records that hang upon the chronological framework.

VI. The Basis for the B.C. Dating of the Kings

The preceding section deals with a tentative chronological arrangement of the reigns of the two Hebrew kingdoms *in relation to each other.* Yet even after a complete chronological pattern has been constructed for these two lines, no B.C. dates can be assigned to any reign unless there is at least one direct synchronism to peg the series down in a fixed alignment with known events in ancient history. Therefore a discussion of the historical basis for the generally accepted B.C. dating of the period must be considered.

The books of Kings refer to several rulers of Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon as being contemporary with certain Hebrew kings. There is an indirect but conclusive synchronism in Assyrian records—though not in the Bible—between the reigns of Ahab and Jehu and that of Shalmaneser III. But the clearest and most certain evidence is found in a series of synchronisms, some of them dated to the month and day, between specific years of several of the last kings of Judah and the years of Nebuchadnezzar. Although there are slight differences of opinion on some of these synchronisms, the capture of Jehoiachin is dated beyond question in

Nebuchadnezzar's 7th (Babylonian) year, in Adar, 597 B.C. For Nebuchadnezzar's reign is fixed astronomically, not only by Ptolemy's Canon, which comes from a later time, but also by a contemporary Babylonian text giving a whole series of exact astronomical data. Therefore the explanation of the evidence for the B.C. dating will begin with the firmly established years of Nebuchadnezzar and will work backward through Ptolemy's Canon and the Assyrian limmu lists.

The Astronomical Tablet of Nebuchadnezzar's 37th Year.—Among the thousands of public and private documents, written on clay tablets, that have been unearthed by archeologist in Mesopotamia, two astronomical texts are of outstanding importance to chronology, for they fix the B.C. dating of the reigns of Nebuchadnezzar II and Cambyses, respectively. The one most valuable for the later period of the Hebrew kings is concerned with the 37th year of Nebuchadnezzar. It contains a series of observational data on the positions of various heavenly bodies throughout a complete year, running from Nisan 1, year 37, to Nisan 1, year 38 of the reign. Modern astronomers who have checked this information by astronomical computation say that the combination of data for the sun, moon, and planets, which all move in differing cycles, cannot be duplicated in any other year within centuries, if ever. Thus Nebuchadnezzar's 37th regnal year is fixed beyond doubt at 568/67 B.C.; and all other years in his reign are established also; the 1st year was 604/03 B.C., and the 7th year, in which he captured Jehoiachin, was 598/97 B.C. Since there are several Biblical synchronisms with Nebuchadnezzar's reign, the end of the kingdom of Judah is anchored to this B.C. dating, but the synchronisms between the Hebrew kings and Assyrian rulers must be located by means of Assyrian chronological lists which are linked with Nebuchadnezzar's reign through the king list known as Ptolemy's Canon.

Ptolemy's Canon Fixed by Eclipses.—The Greek-Egyptian astronomer Claudius Ptolemaeus, or Ptolemy, who lived near Alexandria in the 2nd century of the Christian Era, wrote an astronomical work entitled *Mathematike Syntaxis* ("Mathematical Composition"). It is, however, better known by its Arabic title, the *Almagest*, because it was preserved for posterity by the Arab civilization that flourished during the Dark Ages, when Europe was sunk in ignorance of classical science and literature. This work, which was the authoritative treatise on astronomy for 1,400 years, until superseded by the theory set forth by Copernicus contains data for numerous eclipses and other celestial phenomena, dated to the year, day, and hour in the ancient Egyptian calendar. There are 19 eclipses, ranging over nearly 900 years, many of which are dated in regnal years of various

kings.

As a sort of appendix to the *Almagest* is Ptolemy's Canon, or list, of kings, enumerating consecutive Babylonian, Persian, Macedonian, and Roman rulers, with the lengths of the reigns and the totals, thus furnishing a scale of years by which to reckon intervals between the observations mentioned in the *Almagest*. Since its purpose was not to give a complete record of all the reigns, but to assign a regnal number to every year in the scale, it did not include any reign that lasted less than a year, and the reigns were counted by full years, ignoring the exact date of accession. The years by which it was reckoned were neither lunar nor true solar years, but the ancient Egyptian calendar year of 365 days, which wanders backward through the seasons one day every four Julian years. The starting point of the canon is the beginning of the first regnal year of the Babylonian king Nabonassar, a point that can be placed, by means of the exact intervals given in the *Almagest* between that point and the various eclipses, at noon February 26, 747 B.C. This was the 1st of Thoth, the Egyptian New Year's Day, at that time (although by Nebuchadnezzar's time Thoth 1 had shifted to January, and by the time Ptolemy himself lived, it had moved back through the autumn and into July).

From Ptolemy's Canon, then, it is possible to assign B.C. dates to any regnal year of any of the kings in the list, that is, the years as reckoned in the Egyptian calendar. In the early (Babylonian) period of the Canon of Ptolemy each Egyptian year began about one to four months earlier than the corresponding lunar year beginning with Nisan. This is shown by the way in which the Egyptian years, as fixed by the eclipse data of Ptolemy's *Almagest*, are aligned with the Babylonian years as fixed in the tablet of the 37th year of Nebuchadnezzar and the similar tablet from the 7th year of Cambyses (which even records one of the same eclipses mentioned in the *Almagest*).

Ptolemy wrote many centuries after the early eclipses he records, and depended on copies of the astronomical documents from which his information was originally derived. Yet the canon is corroborated wherever it can be checked by ancient Babylonian, Persian, and Egyptian documents, showing that Ptolemy's regnal numbering corresponded with the contemporary reckoning.

The canon dating harmonizes with the astronomically fixed 37th year of Nebuchadnezzar, although the *Almagest* does not mention that year. It agrees also with another eclipse in the preceding reign, and with three others in the reign of Mardokempad (Marduk-apal-iddin, or the Biblical Merodach-baladan), the earliest eclipse being only 26 years from the starting point of the canon. And since the

number of years from this point back to the first year of Nabonassar agrees with the Babylonian Chronicle and the Babylonian King List A (both found on clay tablets), it can be considered settled that Ptolemy's Canon gives us exact dates as far back as 747 B.C. Furthermore, both the Assyrian king lists and the Assyrian limmu list, sometimes called the Eponym Canon, are in harmony with Ptolemy's reckoning of the lengths of the reigns wherever these lists for the close of the Assyrian Empire overlap the earlier section of the canon dating based on the eclipses. Since the complete canon is not easy to find in publications in English, a translation of it is included, for reference, on the next page.

PTOLEMY'S CANON OF THE KINGS

Years of the Kings Before the Death of Alexander and the Years of Alexander			Additional Data: Year 1 of Each Reign by Egyptian Calendar	
Of the Assyrians and Medes	***Years***	***Totals***	**n.e.**	**Year Begins**
Nabonassar	14	14	1	Feb 26, 747 B.C.
Nadius	2	16	15	" 23, 733
Chinzer and Porus	5	21	17	" 22, 731
Iloulaius	5	26	22	" 21, 726
Mardokempad	12	38	27	" 20, 721
Arkean	5	43	39	" 17, 709
First Interregnum	2	45	44	" 15, 704
Bilib	3	48	46	" 15, 702
Aparanad	6	54	49	" 14, 699
Regebel	1	55	55	" 13, 693
Mesesimordak	4	59	56	" 12, 692
Second Interregnum	8	67	60	" 11, 688
Asaridin	13	80	68	" 9, 680
Saosdouchin	20	100	81	" 6, 667
Kinelanadan	22	122	101	" 1, 647
Nabopolassar	21	143	123	Jan 27, 625
Nabokolassar [Nebuchadnezzar] ...	43	186	144	" 21, 604
Illoaroudam [Evil–Merodach]	2	188	187	" 11, 561
Nerigasolassar [Neriglissar]	4	192	189	" 10, 559
Nabonadius [Nabonidus]	17	209	193	" 9, 555
Of the Persian Kings				

Cyrus	9	218	210	“ 5, 538
Cambyses	8	226	219	“ 3, 529
Darius I	36	262	227	“ 1, 521
Xerxes	21	283	263	Dec 23 486
Artaxerxes I	41	324	284	“ 17, 465
Darius II	19	343	325	“ 7, 424
Artaxerxes II	46	389	344	“ 2, 405
Ochus	21	410	390	Nov 21, 359
Arogus	2	412	411	“ 16, 338
Darius III	4	416	413	“ 15, 336
Alexander of Macedonia	8	424	417	“ 14, 332

Years of the Macedonian Kings After the Death of Alexander the King

Of the Macedonian Kings	***Years***	***Totals***		
Philip	7	7	425	“ 12, 324
Alexander II	12	19	432	“ 10, 317
Ptolemy Lagus	20	39	444	“ 7, 305
Philadelphus	38	77	464	“ 2, 285
Euergetes I	25	102	502	Oct 24, 247
Philopator	17	119	527	“ 18, 222
Epiphanes	24	143	544	“ 13, 205
Philometor	35	178	568	“ 7,181
Euergetes II	29	207	603	Sept 29, 146
Soter	36	243	632	“ 21, 117
Dionysius the Younger	29	272	668	“ 12, 81
Cleopatra	22	294	697	“ 5, 52
Of the Roman Kings				
Augustus	43	337	719	Aug 31, 30 B.C.
Tiberius	22	359	762	“ 20, 14 A.D.
Gaius	4	363	784	“ 14, 36
Claudius	14	377	788	“ 13, 40
Nero	14	391	802	“ 10, 54
Vespasian	10	401	816	“ 6, 68
Titus	3	404	826	“ 4, 78
Domitian	15	419	829	“ 3, 81
Nerva	1	420	844	July 30, 96
Trajan	19	439	845	“ 30, 97
Hadrian	21	460	864	“ 25, 116
Aelius–Antonine [Antoninus Pius]	23	483	885	“ 20, 137

Note.—The first three columns of the tabulation are a translation from the Greek text of Ptolemy's Canon. The heading at the top of column 1, "Of the Assyrians and Medes," refers to kings of Babylon (some of the earlier ones were Assyrian rulers). After the Babylonian kings come "the Persian Kings," whose line ends with Alexander the Great. Then Ptolemy continues with a listing of the Macedonian rulers of the Egyptian division of the defunct empire of Alexander. The list carries on through the Roman emperors, presumably down to the date when Ptolemy lived. The second column gives the length of each reign. The third gives the accumulated total years of the era. Hence the number opposite any king's name represents, in terms of the Nabonassar Era, his last year of reign. Thus for example, the figure 226 opposite Cambyses represents his 8th, that is his last, year. His year 1 is the year 219 of the canon, the year following the total figure for the preceding king, Cyrus. Accordingly, chronologists have referred to Cambyses' first year as n.e. (Nabonassar Era) 219, and have used this n.e numbering throughout, but Ptolemy's Canon gives only the cumulative total at the end of each reign, carrying that cumulative total down only to the end of Alexander the Great's reign, and then beginning a new series of totals.

The last two columns, *not* in Ptolemy's Canon, are added for convenience: the n.e. for the year 1 of each reign, and the B.C. date of Thoth 1, the beginning of each of these Egyptian years of the canon. Ptolemy used the old 365-day Egyptian calendar years, not the years used by the Babylonian, Persian, Macedonian, and Roman rulers, and not the Julian-Egyptian civil calendar as stabilized by Augustus to begin on August 29 (30th every 4 years).

The Assyrian Limmu List, or Eponym Canon.—This overlap of the latter part of the Assyrian chronology with Ptolemy's Canon makes possible the assignment of B.C. dates to the series of names by which the Assyrians designated successive years, the limmu list, or the Eponym Canon. The ancient Assyrian practice was to designate each year, not by a number, but by the name of an annual honorary official, called a limmu (Greek, "eponym"). This office was conferred in turn upon the king and certain of his high officers, generally in a prescribed order. Lists of these named years were kept for official or business use in every city. In the year in which Tiglath-pileser III came to the throne, for example, the limmu for that year was Nabû-bêl-uṣur; hence all documents were dated "in the year of Nabû-bêl-uṣur." The eponym for the next year (the first year of the reign) was Bêl-dân, but in the following year (the second of the reign), the king himself held the title, and so the year was designated as "the year of Tukulti-apil-Esharra" (Tiglath-pileser). The king customarily, though not always, held the office of eponym in the second year

of his reign.

The limmu list is not complete for all of Assyrian history. The extant portion, compiled from various tablets, is consecutive only for the period from about 900 to 650 B.C.; the last period (647–612) is not certain. Fortunately it overlaps Ptolemy's Canon, and is thus anchored to the B.C. dating around 700, when some of the kings of Assyria were also kings of Babylon. Since the limmu list is thus aligned with the B.C. dating near its end, every year in the series can be dated if the list as we have it is complete. In the past there have been differences of opinion concerning possible gaps in the list, but present scholarship accepts it as complete; therefore events recorded as occurring in certain eponymies are confidently dated on this basis—for example, the battle of Qarqar, in which Ahab participated, is placed in 853 B.C.

The King Lists Aligned With the Limmu List.—Since the Assyrian limmu list is a series of names, without numerals, its scale of years can be used only for a purely relative scheme of chronology; it must be aligned with other known dating before it can be employed to assign B.C. dates to recorded events. But some copies of portions of the list carry a notation of a key event for each year, and some have horizontal lines between reigns. Such information makes it possible to align the limmu list with the extant Assyrian king lists as well as with the early part of Ptolemy's Canon. Several of these scales coincide, thus corroborating Ptolemy's Canon for the period preceding the first eclipse record, and locking the eponym list and king lists in alignment with the canon, hence with established B.C. dating.

NOTABLE SYNCHRONISMS BETWEEN PTOLEMY'S CANON AND ASSYRO-BABYLONIAN RECORDS

*1st Year of Reign**	*Ptolemy's Canon*	*Years of Reign*	*Total of Years†*	*From Babylonian King List A‡*	*Years of Reign*	*Extracts From Assyrian Eponym List With Notes (Limmu) (Event Noted)*		*Assyrian King List*	
								King	*Years of Reign*
B.C.									
747/46	Nabonassar	14	14	Nabu-nasir	[14]				
745/44									
744/43						Nabû-bêl-uṣur BeÆl-daÆn	Tiglath-pileser took his seat on [the throne	Tukulti-apil-Esharra III (Tiglath-pileser III)	18
733/32	Nadius	2	16	Nabu-nadin-zeri	2				
731/30									
730/29							The king took the hand of Bêl		
729/28	Chinzer and Porus	5	21	Ukinzer 3 & Pulu (Pul or Tiglath-pileser)‡ 2	5	Naphar-ilu Dûri-Ashshur Bêl-harran-bêl-uṣur	The king took the hand of Bêl		
728/27									
727/26									
726/25	Iloulaius	5	26	Ululaia	5	Marduk-bêl-uṣur	Shalmaneser took his seat on [the throne	Shulmânu-asharêd V (Shalmaneser V)	5
721/20	Mardokempad	12	38	iddin (Mero-dach-baladan)	12	Nabû-ṭâriṣ		Sharru-ukîn II	17

709/08	Arkean	5	43	Sharru-ukéÆn (Sargon II)	5	Mannu-kî-Ashshur-le'i	Sargon took the hand of Bêl	[Tablet: Sargon's yr. 13]§	
705/04						Nashur-beÆl	Sennacherib took his seat on		
704/03	1st Interregnum	2	45	Sin-ahhê-rîba (Sennacherib)	2	Nabu-dini-epush	[the throne	Sin-ahhê-rîba	24

* These years are anchored firmly to Ptolemy's Canon and hence to the other lists aligned with it. Bold figures mean the 1st year of each reign, regardless of the accession reckoning. The years for the canon begin with Thoth 1, somewhat earlier than the Assyro-Babylonian year beginning with Nisan.

† The total represents the year of the canon corresponding to the last year of each reign.

‡ The figures given in this king list are all corroborated by the Babylonian Chronicle. For Pulu in the king list, the Chronicle gives Tiglath-pileser.

§ Several tablets give dates synchronizing the limmu name and the regnal year in Assyrian and Babylonian reckoning: Sargon's 13th yr. in Assyria is his 1st in Babylon; his 14th, 15th, and 16th are his Babylonian 2d, 3rd, and 4th.

The Babylonian Chronicle and king list agree with Ptolemy's Canon in the lengths of the reigns and in the names, except that Ptolemy's Greek spelling is quite different from the Babylonian. After the 14 years of Nabonassar and the 2 of Nabu-nadin-zeri (Ptolemy's Nadius), the Babylonian king list gives Ukinzer 3 years and Pulu (Biblical Pul) 2 years (Ptolemy: Chinzer and Porus, 5 years), whereas the Babylonian Chronicle records that Ukinzer in his 3rd year was defeated by Tiglath-pileser of Assyria, who took over Babylon and himself assumed the title of king of Babylon for two years.

Thus, some years after Tiglath-pileser III (Tukulti-apil-Esharra) began his reign, according to the Assyrian king list, the notation for the year of the limmu named Naphar-ilu reads: "The king took the hand of Bel." That is, the Assyrian king went through the New Year coronation ceremony at Babylon, the rite of receiving the kingship from the god Bel, just as all Babylonian kings did annually; thus in the sight of his Babylonian subjects he became, not a foreign overlord, but a duly consecrated king of Babylon. Since the Babylonian king list calls Ukinzer's successor in Babylon "Pulu," and the Babylonian Chronicle says that it was "Tukulti-apil-Esharra," and that he died in his second year, it is generally accepted that Tiglath-pileser ruled Babylon in his last two years under the name of Pul, differing from his Assyrian throne name.

Two years after Naphar-ilu the limmu list notes the accession of Shalmaneser (V), and then the Assyrian king list attests the 1st of Shulmânu-asharêd V after the 18 years of Tiglath-pileser III. If the accession year of Shalmaneser V, the death year of Tiglath-pileser, is the same as the death year of Pulu, or the 5th of the 5 years assigned to Ukinzer and Pulu (or Chinzer and Porus), then Shalmaneser came to the throne in the year 21 of the canon, or 727/26 B.C., and the 5 years of Shalmaneser correspond to the 5 years of Ululaia, or Iloulaius, king of Babylon. Thus Shalmaneser seems also to have had a different name as king of Babylon. At the end of Shalmaneser's reign the Chaldean leader Marduk-apal-iddin (Ptolemy's Mardokempad) took Babylon and held it for 12 years. This was the Biblical Merodach-baladan. His rule in Babylon parallels the reign of Shalmaneser's successor, Sharru-ukîn, or Sargon II (called Arkean by Ptolemy from the Assyrian *arqu* meaning "second"). After 12 years Merodach-baladan was driven out by Sargon, who "took the hand of Bel" and in 709 B.C. began his five-year rule as king of Babylon. This was the year of Mannu-kî-Ashshur-le'i, in the canon year corresponding to 709 B.C. Also, several cuneiform tablets independently corroborate Sargon's 13th through 16th years of rule over Assyria as his years 1 through 4 in Babylon. The limmu list notes the accession of Sennacherib (Sin-ahhê-rîba), and then his first year is listed in both the Babylonian and the Assyrian king lists. Ptolemy, however, has a 2-year interregnum here; evidently because the memory of Sennacherib's destroying the city of Babylon resulted in the dropping out of his name in some king lists. Consequently Ptolemy's source must have named no king for those 2 years, until Bêl-ibni (Bilib) was placed over Babylon, and none for Sennacherib's last 8 years, where Ptolemy again has an interregnum.

This series of exact parallels between the Canon of Ptolemy and the limmu lists demonstrates that this is a genuine overlap of the two lists, and therefore that these years of the limmu list may be assigned the same B.C. dates as the corresponding canon years. The Assyrian list, thus fixed, can be used from this point back as a chronological scale, as far as it is complete.

The Eclipse of 763 B.C.—How far back is the limmu list complete? In the past this was disputed. Those who used interregna to reconcile the Judah and Israel lines had to assume gaps in the limmu list, but those who used coregencies found harmony between the reigns of the Hebrew kings and their Assyrian contemporaries without assuming gaps in the list. There can be no proof of completeness, since there are no totals or known intervals against which to check the names except where they are corroborated by independent sources. The present list does not depend on merely one original. The fact that several of the

various extant partial lists overlap during this period, makes it relatively unlikely that the list is incomplete here. Those who hold that there are gaps must assume that all these copies came from an older erroneous archetype that was incomplete.

A check point is the year of Bur-sagale (a name variously spelled), in which an eclipse of the sun is mentioned as taking place in the month of Simanu (Sivan). Originally there was difference of opinion as to the date of this event, for there were solar eclipses in that part of the world that could have been dated in Sivan in the years 809, 791, and 763 B.C. But the one in 763 is generally accepted today for several reasons: It was, unlike the other two, a total eclipse; it was visible nearest to Nineveh, and therefore would be the most spectacular eclipse of the period; but further, the extant eponym list, anchored firmly to the B.C. dating of the Canon of Ptolemy, places the year of Bur-sagale precisely in 763 B.C., the nearest and most likely year in which there was an actual eclipse at a time that can be dated in the month Sivan. Since this point is only 30 years away from the period of certain dating, it seems reasonable to assume that the list is correct at least this far back, and that the dating of the synchronisms between the Hebrew kings and Tiglath-pileser cannot be moved very far from the present dating of the Assyrian reigns. Back of 763, however, there is no such check point, and the possibility of gaps in the earlier portion is greater, yet there is no definite reason to doubt the completeness of the list as far back as Shalmaneser III, where we find the earliest synchronism between Assyrian and Hebrew reigns.

Synchronisms Between Hebrew, Assyrian, and Babylonian Kings.— If then the Assyrian limmu list can be used to date the reigns of the Assyrian kings contemporary with the divided Hebrew kingdoms, it can also be used to date the Hebrew reigns wherever they are synchronized with Assyrian kings, just as the last reigns of Judah can be dated by Nebuchadnezzar’s reign. The synchronisms between Hebrew kings and those of Assyria and Babylonia must therefore be discussed under Sec. VII.

VII. The B.C. Dating of the Hebrew Kings

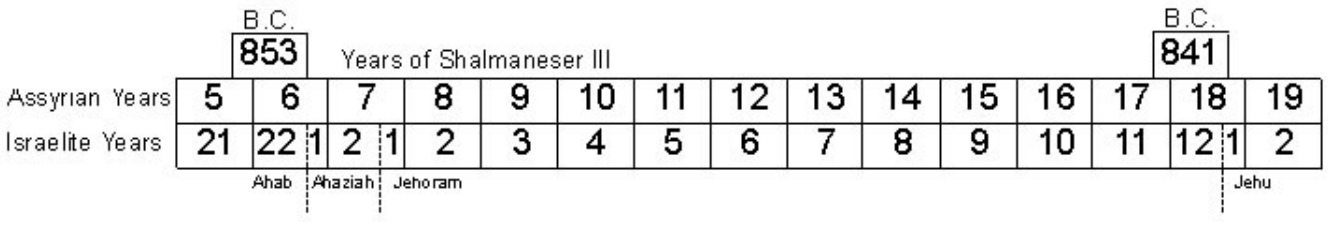
Contacts Between Hebrew Kings and Egyptian Pharaohs.—The earliest mention of a foreign king in connection with a ruler of Israel or Judah is that of Shishak (Egyptian, Sheshonk), who invaded Judah in the 5th year of Rehoboam of Judah (1 Kings 14:25, 26; 2 Chronicles 12:2-9). But this information does not help to locate the 5th year of Rehoboam, because the chronology of the Twenty-second Dynasty is not exactly known. Sheshonk is believed to have begun his reign about

950 B.C. The next contact mentioned is that of “So king of Egypt” with Hoshea of Israel (2 Kings 17:4), but again there is no information to establish any exact date. A third contact is that of “Tirhakah king of Ethiopia” and Hezekiah.

Synchronisms Between Hebrew and Assyrian Kings.—The earliest synchronisms between Israelite and Assyrian kings do not come from the Bible, but from the annals of Shalmaneser III, in the 6th and 18th years of his reign. The first of these was the year assigned in the limmu list to Daiân-Ashshur. Not only does the annotated form of the limmu list give the name of Daiân-Ashshur in the 6th year after the one in which Shalmaneser is noted as taking his seat on the throne, but also some forms of the annals date this campaign in the 6th year of the reign. Shalmaneser’s “Monolith Inscription” records that in the year of Daiân-Ashshur the Assyrian forces went on a western campaign and at Qarqar in Syria met a defensive coalition that included Benhadad of Damascus and *Ahabbu mat Sir’ila*, or “Ahab of the land of Israel.” Twelve years later, on another expedition to the west, in his 18th year, he fought Hazael of Damascus, and received tribute from *Iaua mâr Humri* (“Jehu, son of Omri,” that is, of the land of Omri, or Israel). Shalmaneser’s Black Obelisk shows a relief of Jehu bowing before him, presenting tribute. These two years are now placed in 853 and 841 B.C., respectively. (The dates 854 and 842, based by older authorities on a single limmu list, are contradicted by all other lists.)

These two years were the last of Ahab and the first of Jehu, since there are two intervening reigns (Ahaziah, 2 years, and Joram, 12 years) totaling 12 regnal years by the non-accession-year reckoning with its overlap of one year for each reign:

Twelve Years From Ahab to Jehu



Ahaziah and Jehoram (Joram) intervene with 14 regnal years

Since the B.C. dating of Shalmaneser III seems to be established by the limmu list, the reigns of Ahab, Ahaziah, Joram, and Jehu of Israel are similarly established, also that of the contemporary Ahaziah of Judah, whose brief reign of one year ended in the 12th year of Joram of Israel, that is, the 18th of Shalmaneser. Insofar

as our data are correct, the whole pattern of the two lines of Hebrew kings can be dated in the B.C. scale. It is from this Shalmaneser synchronism that the B.C. date for Solomon's 4th year, the 480th from the Exodus, is placed at 967/66 B.C., and his 40th year, in which the division came, in 931/30.

Jehoash of Israel is probably the Ia'asu mentioned by Adad-nirari III of Assyria. The use of the singular pronoun "he" is held by some to indicate that Pul *and* Tiglath-pileser in 1 Chronicles 5:26 are one person, and that the translation can read Pul, *even* Tiglath-pileser. Pekah and Ahaz are contemporaries of Tiglath-pileser (2 Kings 16:5, 10; 2 Chronicles 28:19-21). The latter's annals mention Menihimme, Paqaha, and Ausi' (translated Menahem, Pekah, and Hoshea), and it is probable, though disputed, that his "Azriau from Iauda" is Azariah of Judah.

Shalmaneser V besieged Samaria which fell "at the end of three years" (inclusive) in the 9th year of Hoshea and the 6th of Hezekiah (2 Kings 17:3, 4; 2 Kings 18:9, 10). Since Sargon II in his later years claimed to have taken Samaria early in his reign, some have thought that the city fell after the death of Shalmaneser, or else that Sargon was the general who actually captured the city just before his accession. But an Assyrian king's vainglorious claim made only in the late editions of his annals incurs suspicion. The one event recorded of Shalmaneser V in the Babylonian Chronicle is the conquest of a city; if its name is to be read as *Shamara'in* (not *Shabara'in*), this would indicate that Samaria fell just before the end of Shalmaneser's reign, in 723/22 B.C.

The last Biblical reference to contact between Assyria and Judah is that between Hezekiah and Sennacherib (although later Esarhaddon's annals mention Manasseh as Menasi, and Ashurbanipal likewise refers to him as "Minsie" of "Iaudi"). Sennacherib invaded the west in the 14th year of Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:13) but did not take Jerusalem. This is evidently Sennacherib's "third campaign" mentioned in the Assyrian annals. The two statements that Shalmaneser (V) came against Samaria in the 4th year of Hezekiah and that Sennacherib invaded Judah in the 14th year of the same king (2 Kings 18:9, 13) do not, as might appear at first glance, conflict with the Assyrian records of the intervening 17-year reign of Sargon II. This interval is a strong indication of a co regency for Hezekiah; it would put Shalmaneser's invasion in the 4th year of the co regency and Sennacherib's in the 14th year of the sole reign.

Although some commentators take account of only one attack on Judah by Sennacherib, the Bible narrative lends itself also to the interpretation that allows for a second invasion late in Hezekiah's reign. Commentators who believe in a

second campaign differ as to where the Biblical narrative makes the transition. However, the mention of “Tirhakah [Egyptian, Taharka] king of Ethiopia” (2 Kings 19:9) as threatening Sennacherib at this time seems to refer to a time near the end of Hezekiah’s reign, for Taharka, a king of the Twenty-fifth Dynasty of Egypt, which was Nubian, or “Ethiopian,” began to reign approximately 690 B.C. at the age of 20, according to present evidence that was published in 1949. This would have been within a very few years of the end of Hezekiah’s 29 years of sole reign. Thus the known date of Shalmaneser V and the approximate dating of Taharka of Egypt combine to favor the view of 29 years plus a co regency for Hezekiah.

Synchronisms Between Kings of Judah and of Babylon.—The final reigns of Judah synchronize with the reign of Nebuchadnezzar (whose 37th year is astronomically fixed), and thus can be given B.C. dates. These may be tabulated:

Babylonian Years of Nebuchadnezzar, B. C.		Yrs. of Kings of Judah (fall–to–fall), B.C.	Notation	Text
1st	604/03	4th Jehoiakim 605/04	23rd from 13th [of Josiah	Jeremiah 25:1, 3
8th	597/96	Deportation of Jehoiachin 597	Reign, 598/97	2 Kings 24:8, 12
18th	587/86	10th Zedekiah 588/87		Jeremiah 32:1
19th	586/85	11th Zedekiah 587/86	City falls, 586	2 Kings 25:2-8; Jeremiah 52:5, 12

These dates agree with the most recent finds when Jehoiakim’s 4th year is aligned with Nebuchadnezzar’s 1st, Jehoiachin’s deportation “when the year was expired” (2 Chronicles 36:10) with Nebuchadnezzar’s 8th year, and Jerusalem’s fall with the latter’s 19th, if the Jewish fall-to-fall year is taken into account.

Note: *These synchronisms, though interpreted variously, can be harmonized with the data on this basis: that any Jewish civil-calendar year began half a year before the corresponding Babylonian year in Nebuchadnezzar’s reign. Nebuchadnezzar reckoned his year 1 from the next Babylonian New Year’s Day following his accession, that is, with Nisan 1 in the spring of 604 B.C. Thus his accession year, counted from his father’s death in August, 605, was about eight months long in the Babylonian calendar. But if the Jews reckoned Nebuchadnezzar’s reign by their own fall-to-fall civil calendar, they counted as his accession year only the interval from August, 605, to their own autumn New Year, Tishri 1, 605; they would reckon his first year (equated in Jeremiah 25:1 with the 4th of Jehoiakim) from autumn,*

605, to autumn, 604.

The word translated "first" in the foregoing Jeremiah text is ri'shonith, generally taken as a synonym of ri'shon, which is translated "first" in many other texts (Numbers 9:1-5; Deuteronomy 16:4; Ezra 6:19; etc.). But some hold that by hashshanah hari'shonith Jeremiah meant "the accession year" rather than "the first year" of Nebuchadnezzar. Indeed, "accession year" is required here if Jehoiakim's 4th year is to be reckoned, like the Babylonian year, from the spring; for in that case it would end at the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's year 1 in the spring of 604. But if "the fourth year of Jehoiakim" meant a Jewish year beginning in the autumn, it would overlap the first half of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian year 1 and it would coincide exactly with the latter's year 1 as reckoned from autumn, in the Jewish civil calendar.

By this Jewish reckoning the 3rd year of Jehoiakim, in which David was taken captive (Daniel 1:1), covers the spring and summer of 605; this agrees precisely with the record in the Babylonian Chronicle of the crown prince Nebuchadnezzar's campaign in Syria-Palestine, during which his father's death summoned him home to take the throne. Josephus' account of this incident says that he left his captives, including Jews, to be brought on to Babylon by a slower route. Thus Jeremiah's prophetic message concerning the beginning of the captivity (Jeremiah 25:1-11), received in the 4th year of Jehoiakim, could have been received in either the accession year or the 1st year of Nebuchadnezzar in the Babylonian calendar, for the Jewish civil-calendar year 4 would have been 605/04 B.C., fall to fall.

Similarly, in connection with Jehoiachin's captivity, the Bible references to Nebuchadnezzar's 8th year and the turn of the year (evidently about Nisan 1) are corroborated by the new archeological findings. The Babylonian record dates Jehoiachin's capture on Adar of the 7th year, but in that month (the last of the Babylonian 7th year) the 8th year according to the Jewish civil calendar was already half gone, since it had begun six months earlier than the Babylonian year. There is complete harmony between the two records. These synchronisms also align the fall of Jerusalem, in Zedekiah's 11th year, with the 19th of Nebuchadnezzar.

Ezekiel, who was taken captive to Babylon with Jehoiachin, frequently dates events by years of this captivity, for example:

Ezekiel's vision of the siege, 9th yr. of captivity—Ezekiel 24:1, 2 (see the same date for the beginning of the siege—2 Kings 25:1; Jeremiah 52:4).

News of the city's fall reaches Ezekiel in 10th month, 12th year—Ezekiel 33:21

(see fall of the city in 4th month of 11th year of Zedekiah and 19th year of Nebuchadnezzar—Jeremiah 39:2; 52:6-14).

Ezekiel's vision in the 25th year of the captivity, the 14th after the city was smitten—Ezekiel 40:1.

These dates do not determine whether Ezekiel computed the years of Jehoiachin's captivity from the spring or fall, or by anniversary reckoning from date of capture. These alternatives, along with differing opinions on the alignment of the 4th year of Jehoiakim and the 1st of Nebuchadnezzar, result in different dates for Ezekiel's vision of the siege, and the news of the city's fall.

Ezekiel's reckoning, however, does not necessarily apply to another date formula given in terms of the captivity of Jehoiachin, the release of the captive king in the 12th month of the 37th year. Amel-Marduk, Nebuchadnezzar's successor, took him from prison in Babylon "in the year that he began to reign" (2 Kings 25:27) or "in the *first* year of his reign" (Jeremiah 52:31; *first* being a supplied word). These two texts, respectively, read literally: "in the year when he was (or became) king" (2 Kings 25:27), and "in the year of his kingship" (Jeremiah 52:31). Some have considered "the year" of Amel-Marduk to be, on the analogy of the Arabic, his year 1, since it was *the* year—indeed, the only full calendar year—of his reign, for he died in his year 2. Others say that it means his accession year because "in the year that he reigned" may be taken to imply that in which he *began* to reign. If in Kings and Jeremiah the years of Jehoiachin's captivity are counted inclusively from the fall-to-fall year in which he was taken, the 12th month of the 37th year falls in the Babylonian accession year of Amel-Marduk, in the spring of 561 B.C., which would be in year 1 as counted by Judah's fall-to-fall year. It is not necessary to assume that Ezekiel's reckoning in Babylon was the same as that used in Judah in the closing days of the monarchy. It could

be an example of differing reckonings. This point, however, has no effect on the date of the end of the kingdom of Judah.

Assigning B.C. Dates to the Hebrew Lines.—Assuming, then, that we have a scheme of the reigns of the Hebrew kings that is at least relatively consistent and tentatively correct, we can superimpose on that pattern the scale of B.C. dating to make the years of Nebuchadnezzar, whose B.C. equivalents are known, synchronize with the last reigns of Judah, and can work back from there. If the

earlier synchronisms between Hebrew kings and the Assyrian rulers can be fitted in, without doing violence to the Biblical figures, during the time when the limmu list and the Canon of Ptolemy overlap; and if the still earlier period of Shalmaneser III with Ahab and Jehu can be harmonized also, it will appear that the reconstruction of the chronology of this period is reasonably correct.

This does not necessarily mean that every detail can be considered absolutely fixed, for where so many overlapped reigns must be allowed for, there may be more than one feasible way to adjust the relationships of these reigns. But the general scheme may be regarded as based on sound principles and usable as a working hypothesis for dating Biblical events. Absolutely exact dates can be given for only those events that are directly and unambiguously connected with some fixed point of reference, like the synchronisms of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. Even in such cases dates given in terms of lunar months cannot be dogmatically dated to the very day without allowing room for the variation of a day, sometimes of a month.

Although the exact chronology of all the Hebrew reigns is not regarded as fixed, the pattern is sufficiently complete to allow the listing of B.C. dates as at least tentative approximations for the reader's convenience. These dates are *not* given as a final statement of the exact chronology. Though the last few reigns of Judah are aligned with the Babylonian years of Nebuchadnezzar, the B.C. dates of earlier kings are to be taken as approximate, although possibly, and in most cases very probably, correct.

Other dates are relatively less certain, as they are distant in time from such fixed dates, or as they are involved in some of the adjustments, such as assumed coregencies, made solely on the basis of making the synchronisms fit on paper—as must be done provisionally if a complete scale is to be constructed at all.

The possible uncertainty of a few days, or even a few years, does not outweigh the value of a series of dates presented as a working hypothesis for the reader's convenience, but it is well to preserve an open mind for the possible revision of some of these minutiae when additional information becomes available.

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